



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

LABOR AND WAGES IN FRANCE

By E. LEVASSEUR,

Professor of Economic Geography, History and Statistics in the Collège de France, Paris.

Concerning labor and wages much has been written and more will be written, because they have begun to assume great importance in social economy and contemporary politics. As we cannot discuss all phases of them in an article of a few pages, we shall treat the condition of labor in France with regard to three points only, the organization of labor, the rate of wages, and the cost of living.

I.

In France, as in other manufacturing countries, great changes have taken place in the organization and condition of the laboring class, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century. These changes are closely connected with a series of events which have fundamentally altered the economic condition of the world: the sudden increase in the gold supply, the progress of machine industry, the development of railways, particularly of international lines, the transformation of navigation by the application of steam and the use of iron in shipbuilding, the creation of a world-wide network of telegraph and cable lines, the extension of colonial possessions and the opening of new countries to commerce. To these causes must be added in France the establishment of universal suffrage, in 1848, which made labor questions the order of the day in politics, under imperial as well as under republican government. Indeed, before 1848, no law in favor of the working class had been put into effect, excepting the law of March 22, 1841, on child labor in industrial establishments, which was hardly anywhere enforced. During the second Republic, from 1848 to 1851, there was a sudden outbreak of plans for social reform, inspired by the socialist or philanthropic theories of the day, and several laws were passed by the Constituent Assembly, or by the Legislative Assembly, concerning boards of arbitration, apprenticeship, societies for mutual aid, poor relief in Paris and old-age pensions. The Second Empire did

not forget that it owed its existence to popular vote, and, although exercising dictatorial power, gave a more democratic turn to economic legislation than the monarchy had done. It developed mutual aid societies; it abolished certain obsolete restrictions on trades of butchers and bakers in Paris; it struck out of the civil code an article which made employer and employee unequal before the law. The most important law of this kind was that of May 25, 1864, which removed from the penal code the crime of combination, although maintaining the penalties for violence committed by strikers.

After the re-establishment of the Republic, the theory of universal suffrage was generally accepted, and since the election of M. Grévy to the Presidency (January 30, 1879) the Republican party has been in power. The government has inclined more and more to the Left; since the ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau (1899) radicalism has been dominant in Parliament, and the influence of socialism has increased.

In consequence, labor legislation has multiplied. A law had been passed on May 19, 1874, regulating the employment in industry of children and of women under age. Under the Presidency of Grévy primary education had first been made free by law (June 16, 1881) and compulsory (March 28, 1882). Later came a third law (October 30, 1886) making education secular in the public schools; and a very important law (March 21, 1884) legalized the existence of organizations of laborers and employers.

Under the Presidency of Carnot many important laws were enacted, beginning with that of July 2, 1890, which repealed the requirement of the workman's book. The law of November 9, 1892, besides re-enforcing the system of protection for women and children in industry, fixed their maximum labor day at ten hours. The act of December 27, 1892, provided for conciliation and voluntary arbitration; that of July 12, 1893, dealt with the health and safety of factory workers; that of July 15, 1893, granted free medical aid; that of June 29, 1894, provided pensions for miners; that of April 1, 1898, regulated mutual aid societies; that of April 9, 1898, provided indemnity for industrial accidents. The law of March 30, 1900, made the length of the working day ten hours, not only for women and children, but also for men in trades where they work with women or children.

Under the Presidency of M. Loubet the law of July 1, 1901, assured general freedom of association, although still submitting religious associations to some restrictions. In 1905 (July 13) financial aid was provided for the destitute, the aged and incurables.

Under the Presidency of M. Fallières legislation was passed (July 13, 1908) requiring the observance of a weekly rest-day; Parliament has continued to discuss the proposed bill for pensioning workingmen, which has been pending for more than fifteen years, and upon which the two houses are far from being in agreement.

We cannot pass any general judgment upon these laws, of which some afford needed protection, as of children in industry, while others hinder work and the increase of wealth. Such legislation grows out of the system of economic intervention, that is, governmental protection of wage earners, especially industrial workers, and administrative interference in the relations of employer and employee. Intervention and liberalism are often directly opposed as regards economic questions; intervention has won greater popular favor in France, and consequently has become the dominant theory in Parliament to-day, as is easily seen by the mass of labor legislation enacted during the ascendancy of the Republican party.

II.

Combinations existed in France before 1884, but they had no legal sanction. The law of March 21, 1884, gave them legal recognition: "Article I, Combinations or professional associations of persons practicing the same or allied occupations, may be freely organized without governmental authorization." "Article II, Professional combinations have exclusively for their aim the study and defense of economic, industrial, commercial and agricultural interests. Political and religious questions are forbidden them."

The three kinds of organizations, employers' associations, trade unions and agricultural associations, increased rapidly under this régime. Mixed unions, combining employers and employees, alone had little success. In 1885 there were but 594 legally recognized unions; in January, 1907, there were 12,971 unions, 3,612 employers' associations, 5,322 labor unions, 154 mixed unions, 3,899 agricultural associations. The growth of the movement had been not only continuous but progressive. In point of membership the labor unions naturally have the lead. On January 18, 1907, they numbered

896,012, as against 316,217 members of employers' associations. About 19 per cent of employers are organized and about 26 per cent of workingmen are members of unions. There are trades in which this proportion is much higher, as, for example, in mining, where 65 per cent of the employers and 35 per cent of the miners are members of organizations.

Women up to the present time have taken a much less active part than men in this movement; in 1907 there were only 79,260 women in trade unions and 6,429 in mixed unions.

The 3,883 agricultural associations numbered 716,530 members in 1907. Although largely comprised of land owners and cultivators, most of the associations admit farm laborers, or at least métayers (share-renters).

There are also federations of unions, authorized by the law of 1884. There were in January, 1907, 308 federations (110 employers', 187 laborers' and 11 mixed), comprising 6,173 unions and 1,011,975 members.¹

The unionists, especially those of the labor party, were not entirely satisfied with the law of 1884. They claim more extended privileges; they protest against Articles 414 and 415 of the Penal Code relating to strikes, which punish violence committed during strikes. Whatever its purpose, the law of 1884 has produced important results, as statistics show. Without doubt, for a long time to come, the membership of unions will increase, because the principle of association continues to become more and more a matter of course, being, for labor a road to power and for capital a wall of defense.

Are the results good or bad? They are both. One might say they were generally good, had not the union so often departed from the course which the lawmaker has laid out for it. This organization of labor is new; by means of it the laboring class, as a whole, has already gained, and will continue to gain power with which to make good its claims. The leaders and enthusiastic supporters of unions have found here a financial and social situation which increases their own importance. Time and again the organized work-

¹ An article from the *American Federationist*, November, 1908, attributes to labor unions 3,000,000 members in the United States, 2,500,000 in England and Germany, and 1,500,000 in France. French statistics for January 1, 1907, show 896,012 members of trade unions and 316,217 members of employers' associations.

ers have been led as a body to adopt policies which they do not individually desire, and which they know are not to their interest.

The employers had formed associations under different names before the law of 1884, and they have, perhaps, gained nothing from the new system. Their adoption of it has been due less to the recognized advantages of association than to fear of the labor unions.

The idea of association seems to imply that of union. However, it is evident that, outside of agriculture, the mixed unions, in which wage earners and wage payers ought to be able to forward their mutual interests, have had but little success. Those which have prospered are the associations grouping workers and employers in two hostile armies, opposed one to the other, and organized permanently on a war footing. The group of workers is always disposed to encroach on the authority of the employers, to claim more and more advantages, and to declare war in order to secure those advantages. The employers, striving to maintain the *status quo*, answer, with the lockout, demands which they consider unjustifiable. Such a state of things is favorable neither to the increase of wealth nor to social harmony. Nevertheless, it must be tolerated for the time being, and it is not too much to hope that greater intelligence and stability in France will come with experience. The great trade unions of England have to-day a more rational program and a greater influence in the political and industrial world than they had three-quarters of a century ago.

Contest is not, however, the sole object of organization. Workingmen have two ways of interpreting and practicing unionism: One is, that the union should occupy itself exclusively with the immediate business of the trade, striving to keep wages from falling and finding ways of increasing them, discussing questions relating to the personnel of the factory and shop rules, and creating and maintaining institutions useful to the members of the unions, such as employment bureaus, mutual aid societies, traveling benefits, out-of-work benefits and trade instruction. These forms of activity are in accord with the provisions of the law of 1884.

The other interpretation allows the union not only to occupy itself with strictly trade affairs, but also to work by systematic agitation for the breakdown of the existing social order, and thus to prepare for a new order of things in which the wage earner and

the employer will no longer exist as such, but will be replaced by a universal association of workers. This introduces into the trade union the very political element forbidden by the law of 1884. The so-called yellow unions belong to the first class; to the second, many of the red, and especially the revolutionary unions.

Labor exchanges are the centers of union action. They were created not by general law, but by municipal authorization. The first was that of Paris, opened in 1887. The placing of workingmen is and should be one of their principal functions, yet the 131 exchanges in France secured in 1906 only 62,000 positions for workers. They are in general under the influence of the red unions and, as in the case of the federations, it too often happens that, although created for the service of the wage earning class, they tend to become hotbeds of revolutionary doctrine.

There are numerous federations having a sense of their economic rights and duties, like the General Book Federation. There are others that are filled with revolutionary sentiment and hatred of the existing order.

The red unions in general are imbued with socialistic theories, especially of the collectivist or communist type, or with the doctrine of anarchy. Considering the directors of industry robbers, who through profit are appropriating unjustly part of the product of labor, they always oppose them as enemies. They fight not only for increased wages and shorter hours, which is legitimate, but they favor a reduction of the output of labor during these hours. They believe that by doing less and leaving more to be done, they compel the employer to pay them for more time and to employ those who are out of work. It is not only in France that such ideas prevail. They advise workmen dissatisfied with their employers to repay themselves by *sabotage*; that is, by wasting raw materials, spoiling work and sending out imperfect products, an act which is, in reality, very much like theft. The General Federation of Labor is to-day the most powerful union in France which professes and practices this doctrine. Although holding only socialistic theories, it refuses to join the Socialist party in parliament, which it accuses of being a bourgeois, phrase-making party. The Federation claims to represent only the labor party pure and simple. Its watchword is "direct action"; that is, establishment of its standards by strike and insurrection against the existing industrial organization.

“Unionism,” says the General Labor Federation, “forces the laboring class into line of battle. Unionism implies that the working class is the only one that can renew the world, and this only if it keeps free from bourgeois domination. Laborers are robbed by employers who control the armed force of society, but the robbed, who have right already on their side, need only unite in order to have might also. By employing the general strike they can strangle capitalism and substitute voluntary control by producers for capitalistic control.” It is in order to wrest power from the employing class that the Federation preaches the doctrine of anti-militarism and anti-patriotism. Such a doctrine put into practice by “direct action” is a constant menace to society. The question of suppressing the Federation of Labor for violating the provisions of the law of 1884 relative to political action has been recently agitated by the press.

III.

The declaration and the management of strikes is one of the chief objects of union action. There were, indeed, strikes in France before the laws of May 25, 1864, and March 19, 1884, but they have increased in number as a consequence of these laws, the first of which made combination legal, and the second of which gave the strike a legal status.

From 1871 to 1884 the number of recognized strikes varied in different years, from 21 in 1874 to 182 in 1882. From 1893 on, the statistics of strikes are almost complete. In 1894, 391 strikes were recorded, with 54,576 strikers; in 1906, 1,309 strikes with 432,366 strikers. This is the maximum. The increase is considerable, but it has not been regularly progressive. Ordinarily, strikes increase in years of great industrial activity, when the demand for labor exceeds the supply, as in 1896; on the contrary, they diminish in dull years, when many laborers find difficulty in getting work, and when the unions understand that there is no use in asking for increased wages. More than a third of all strikes have been due to demands for higher wages. Next among causes of strikes come the reduction of working hours, the method and regulation of wage payment, the dismissal of workingmen, and of foremen.

From 1900 to 1906 the general outcome of strikes was as follows: 23 per cent succeeded, 39.7 per cent were compromised,

37.2 per cent failed. As the labor unions are better organized since the law of 1884, arbitration appears to have become more common than formerly, but it is questionable whether strikes have actually contributed to a general rise of wage-rates.

However important strikes may be, they involve only a very small fraction of the working class. From 1890 to 1899, there were on the average only 87,000 workmen engaged in strikes, out of 5,500,000 industrial workers; that is, a little more than one and a half per cent.

There are two general classes of strikes. The purely trade strikes are conflicts between workingmen and one or more employers in the same industry, which have a definite object and which usually come to an end without attracting public attention. These are much the more numerous. Revolutionary strikes which aim to arouse society and to prepare by forcible upheaval for the coming of an ideal state are, on the contrary, usually disorderly. They often cause acts of violence that necessitate military repression. The general strike would be an exceedingly revolutionary movement, and in fomenting it the General Federation of Labor is a constant menace to society. But there has never been such an uprising, and it would seem an impossibility to produce a simultaneous strike of all wage-earners.

IV.

The next question is, what have been the changes in nominal wages since the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, what have been the variations in the sum of money which the workman receives as the price of a day's labor? The four decennial Reports on Agriculture, give as the average wages of farm hands in summer, 1.42 francs in 1850; 2.77 in 1862; 3.11 in 1882; 2.94 in 1892. Thus wages more than doubled from 1850 to 1882, decreasing slightly in 1892, a year of general low prices. The statistics of wages in industry, although insufficient for the calculation of an exact average, are more numerous and more varied than those of agricultural wages. The following table gives an index number of wages in the building trades of Paris from the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Year.	Index ² Number.	Year.	Index Number.
1806	100	1873	193.3
1852	148.3	1880	252.0
1862	187.8	1900	271.1

Masons in Paris, for example, earned 3.90 francs for twelve hours' work in 1806; they earned 8.00 francs in ten hours from 1900 to 1905. In the coal mining industry, from which the government engineers have gathered annual statistics, the average daily wage was found to be 2.09 francs in 1884; 3.25 francs in 1872; 4.53 francs in 1905.

Statistics of wages in the minor industries in the chief towns of the various departments, collected by order of the Minister of Commerce, give the following average for the two extremes of the series: In 1853, 3.82 francs in Paris, and 2.01 francs in the other cities; in 1887, 5.34 francs and 3.17 francs, that is, an increase of 57 per cent in Paris and of 66 per cent in the provinces. A recent investigation has given as the averages, 6.37 francs in 1896 and 6.93 francs in 1901, in Paris; 3.85 francs and 3.92 francs in the provinces. From 1853 to 1901 the increase amounts to 81 per cent for Paris and to 92 per cent for the provinces.

The Bureau of Labor regularly receives from the mayors and boards of arbitration information which gives these results: First, the scale of average wages in the chief towns of the provinces, not including Paris, was as follows: In 1853, 1.99 francs; in 1874, 3.02 francs; in 1906, 4.20 francs. Second, the index numbers of wages run thus:

Year.	Index ³ Number.	Year.	Index Number.
1806	46.5	1860	64.5
1810	47	1870	76
1820	48.5	1880	92.5
1830	50	1890	98
1840	52	1900	100
1850	56.5	1905	104

These different scales must be considered as mere approximations, since they are the result, not of complete statistics, but of

² Calculated on 1806 as a basis.

³ Calculated on 1900 as a basis.

partial information; nevertheless, they are as nearly accurate as possible. They show: First, a general increase in wages from one decade to another; second, a slow increase up to 1850; third, a rapid increase from 1850 to 1880; fourth, a slower increase since 1880, synchronous with a general fall in wholesale prices; fifth, a retardation of the increase since 1896, this is scarcely perceptible on the last scale, to 1905 and more perhaps in 1906 and 1907. To sum up, the nominal average wage has more than doubled since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

These averages and these index numbers are composed of very diverse elements. For example, in a certain city in 1901, the average wage for day laborers was about 2.91 francs, and that for carpenters about 5.20 francs, the differences being due to the differences of occupation. At Auch, a city with little industry, the general average is about 2.52 francs, while it is about 5.79 francs at Versailles and about 7.50 francs in the department of the Seine, the difference being due to locality. A report of the Bureau of Labor on the furniture trades shows an average wage of 3.43 francs for young workers from 12 to 17 years of age; 7.19 francs for workmen from 25 to 44 years; 5.93 francs for those over 64, the differences being due to differences in age. In the steel industry in Longwy in 1905 the head firemen earned 8.50 francs to 9.30 francs a day and the unskilled workers 3.50 to 3.95 francs, differing according to the different tasks in the same trade. In general, the wages of women do not amount to more than half or two-thirds of those of men, the difference being due to sex.

It is worth noting that the wages of domestic servants who seldom form unions and who do not unite in order to strike, have increased at least as much as the wages of workingmen, and probably even more. The causes of this increase are known. From this fact we may draw the conclusion that unionism deludes itself when it claims that it is the principal cause of the increase in the rate of wages.

The nominal wage increased greatly during the second half of the nineteenth century. This is an undisputable fact, although it is impossible to give a precise general measure of such increase, and although it differs widely according to place, trade and individual.

Is the real wage also greater, that is, can the workingman with his increased money wage buy more than formerly of the consump-

tion goods ordinarily used by a workingman's family? The second problem is much more complex than the first, and it is not possible to do more than to give an approximate solution.

The problem may be simplified by considering a limited number of articles of consumption. The first fact to be noted is that the price of bread, an important article of food in the French workingman's family, has fallen rather than risen within the last forty years. The second notable fact is that the price of food in general, like that of many other articles of merchandise, was on the increase from 1850 to 1873-1880, then fell until about 1896, and from that year until 1907 rose again.

Since it is impossible in this brief paper to multiply proofs of this fact, as is done in my volume entitled "*Questions ouvrières et industrielles en France sous la troisième République*" and in that entitled "*de Salariat et Salaires*" we will confine ourselves to a few illustrations.

First is the example of the Lycée of Louis le-Grand, the accounts of the expenditures of which are reliable and accurate. We find there stated the price per unit of each commodity bought since 1840, and we have added up the totals for each year. The total is 16.63 francs in 1847, before the rise in prices, 18.62 francs in 1873, following the almost constant annual rise in prices, 16.51 francs in 1905, following a series of years of falling prices, then a rise which brought the total to 18.36 francs in 1906.⁴ These give, it is true, practically wholesale prices, but retail prices follow wholesale, although somewhat irregularly.

Another proof is found in the work of the statistician Bienaymé who very conscientiously studied the problem of prices in Paris, computing the cost of living (food) by a tabulation of figures; first, from 1830 to 1850, the index numbers fall from 124 to 96; second, from 1855 to 1880, they rise from 124 to 156; thirdly, from 1880 to 1896, they fall to 120. From 1896 to 1900, a period which M. Bienaymé has not included in his researches, the index numbers have quite perceptibly risen. Likewise the unit price of 88 kinds of groceries in common use fell from 111.79 francs in 1881, to 82.54 francs, and rose again to 106.05 francs in 1908.

A third proof is found in the extensive statistics collected by

⁴ 17.68 francs in 1908.

the Bureau of Labor in the United States within the past ten years, which show an increase, in the same way, of retail prices of food.

After food, which absorbs from 40 to 60 per cent of his family income, sometimes even more in cases of low wages and a large family, the next important item of the workingman's budget is rent, including light and heat. Rent has greatly increased in Paris, and in large centers generally. It has not increased in small towns, whose population has remained stationary, or has diminished.

The Bureau of Labor has extended this inquiry further; it has tried to estimate the cost of food, rent, heat and light, taken altogether, on the hypothesis that their quality and quantity have not varied. If this cost for 1900 is represented by 100, the corresponding figure for 1906 is 77; for 1850, 86.5; and for 1880, 107. The cost evidently rose up to 1880 and then up to 1900 fell.

The Bureau of Labor has made the following table of comparisons:

Year.	Index Number of Nominal Wages.	Year.	Index Number of Cost of Living. ⁵
1853.....	100	1844-1853.....	100
1874.....	150	1864-1873.....	131
1892.....	184	1884-1893.....	127

Without claiming for these estimates mathematical precision, we may conclude that since 1874, not only has the nominal wage increased rapidly, but the real wage, or purchasing power, has increased even more.

These data are not sufficient really to solve the problem; for the saying has long been as true of the workingman's as of the *bourgeois* family, "Living grows dearer." Certainly one cannot live to-day on the same income as sixty years ago. This is due not only to the possible fall in the commercial value of money, that is to say its purchasing power, but also to a certain lessening in the *social value of money*; that is to say, more money is needed to maintain the standard of living of any given social group. Wants multiply as the progress of industry increases the material means of satisfying them, and as increased income makes more complete satisfaction financially possible. For example, the food of the workingman in town and country has greatly improved, and consequently costs more.

⁵ For a fixed amount of food, shelter, heat and light.
(418)

Illustrations of this may be found in *Questions ouvrières et industrielles en France sous la troisième République*.

The workingman in Sunday clothes might be taken for a *bourgeois*; it was quite otherwise in France seventy-five years ago. Traveling by rail is less expensive now than traveling by carriage formerly. Yet the workingman's traveling expenses are much higher than formerly, because then they went on foot and moved about much less frequently than now. They read little, and did not have their pictures taken; to-day they all buy newspapers and have photographs, and there are a hundred other occasions for expenditure. One observes these changes in domestic economy in comparing the average per capita consumption of different periods. The higher standard of living must be paid for in all classes of society; this is the chief reason for the increased cost of living.

A family at first appreciates the increase in well being. Soon, however, it becomes accustomed to the improvement, and its feeling of satisfaction wanes. People are thoughtless in this respect; what they feel most keenly is the diminution of well being, when it accidentally occurs. Workingmen have more comfort, but probably no more satisfaction in it, because instead of glancing back upon the condition of their grandfathers, they keep their eyes fixed on the large incomes of their employers, and they are discontented with an inequality for the economic cause of which they seek no explanation. Hence arises a social unrest, which tends to intensify itself, and which is one reason for the success of the socialist propaganda.

In summing up, we may deduce the following fourfold conclusion respecting the condition of the French workingman.

First, an increase in nominal wages during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of varying proportions in various periods.

Second, a lowering or maintaining of the cost of ordinary articles of consumption (not luxuries) according to whether the prices temporarily are low or high.

Third, an increase in real wages.

Fourth, an increase in the cost of living, due to more abundant, more refined and more varied consumption.